

The Eight Precepts in Theravada Buddhism

The minimum requirements for a Theravada Buddhist are the Five Precepts (*Panca Sila*). Theravada Buddhism also offers two different versions of the Eight Precepts:

(i) Atthangika Uposatha Sila (Eight Uposatha Precepts)

(ii) Ajivatthamaka Sila (Eight Precepts with Right Livelihood as the Eighth)

The Eight Precepts are observed on the *Uposatha* Days (full moon, new moon and the two half moon days). Lay people often wear white clothes and spend entire *Uposatha* days at the temple. Before the day's activities begin, the presiding monk administers the Eight Precepts and after the day's religious activities are over, administers the Five Precepts, thus releasing the devotee from the Eight Precepts.

(i) Atthangika Uposatha Sila (Eight Uposatha Precepts)

1) *Panatipata veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the rule of training to refrain from killing living beings;

2) *Adinnadana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the rule of training to refrain from taking what is not given;

3) *Abrahmacariya veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the rule of training to refrain from non-celibate conduct;

4) *Musavada veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the rule of training to refrain from false speech

5) *Sura – meraya – majja pamadatthana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the rule of training to refrain from drugs and drink which tend to cloud the mind;

6) *Vikala bhojana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the rule of training to refrain from taking food at an unseasonable time;

7) *Nacca – gita – vadita – visuka – dassana – mala - gandha vilepana - dharana mandana vibhusanatthana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the rule of training to refrain from dancing, singing, music, and unseemly shows; from the use of garlands, perfumes, and unguents; and from things that tend to beautify and adorn [the person];

8) *Ucchasayana – mahasayana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the rule of training to refrain from using high and luxurious seats and beds.

(ii) Ajivatthamaka Sila (Eight Precepts with Right Livelihood as the Eighth)

1) *Panatipata veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the rule of training to refrain from killing living beings;

2) *Adinnadana veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the rule of training to refrain from taking what is not given;

3) *Kamesu micchacara veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the rule of training to refrain from sexual misconduct;

4) *Musavada veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the rule of training to refrain from false speech;

5) *Pisuna vaca veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the rule of training to refrain from backbiting;

6) *Pharusa vaca veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the rule of training to refrain from using harsh or abusive speech;

7) *Samphappalapa veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the rule of training to refrain from useless or meaningless conversation;

8) *Micchajiva veramani sikkhapadam samadiyami*

I undertake the rule of training to refrain from wrong means of livelihood.

These precepts can also be taken on *Uposatha* days. In recent years the Sri Lankan Theravada Sangha (Buddhist monastic order) in the west have developed the use of the *Ajivatthamaka Sila* precepts for western lay practitioners. Some westerners expressed a wish to undertake these as a lifetime commitment in a ceremony conducted by a senior monk.

The above article appeared in *Buddhism Now*, Volume 18 (2) (February, 2006) published by the BPG Buddhist Publishing Group.

POSTSCRIPT

Developments have taken place since the above article was published in February 2006.

Venerable Pidiville Piyatissa *Maha Thera* has administered *Atthangika Uposatha Sila* (The Eight *Uposatha* Precepts) to attendees of the Buddhist Group of Kendal (Theravada) at meditation retreats. *Upasaka* Dhammika regularly observes them on *Uposatha* days.

At Ketumati Buddhist Vihara's Wesak Celebrations on 14th May 2006, Venerable Piyatissa *Maha Thera* presented Sangha Authorized Dhamma Teacher badges to Titus Gomes (authorized at the London Buddhist Vihara in 1980), Jacquetta Gomes Gomes (authorized by Venerable Balangoda Ananda Maitreya *Mahanayaka Thera Abhidhaja Maharatthaguru Agga Maha Pandita* (1896-1998) in 1983 in Manchester, and by Venerable Hammalawa Saddhatissa *Maha Thera* (1914-1990) who at the time was Chief Sangha Nayaka of the UK and the Abbot of the London Buddhist Vihara in 1984 at the London Buddhist Vihara), John Gerrard and John Griffiths (authorized by Venerable Piyatissa in 2001 and 2002). Cream sashes were presented to *Upasakas* Sumedha, Mahinda and Punna who undertook the *Ajivatthamaka Sila* for Life with Venerable Piyatissa as Preceptor (in 2000 and 2002), and to *Upasika* Jayasili (who undertook an expansion of the *Ajivatthamaka Sila* with Venerable Balangoda

Ananda Maitreya Mahanayaka Thera Abhidhaja Maharatthaguru Agga Maha Pandita (1896-1998) as Preceptor). These sashes must be worn when they administer *Panca Sila* (Five Precepts) in the absence of a *Bhikkhu* (Monk) or *Ayya* (Nun). (In June 2007 *Upasika* Panna received the Eight Lifetime Precepts (an expansion of the *Ajivatthamaka Sila*) from Venerable Henepola Gunaratana Maha Thera at Gaia House, and a cream sash from Venerable Piyatissa.)

The 2006 Wesak celebrations also included the distribution of the booklet *Requirements and Ceremonies for the Five Precepts (Panca Sila)*, *The Eight Precepts with Right Livelihood as the Eighth (Ajivatthamaka Sila)*, *Dhamma Teachers Certificate*, written jointly by Ketumati Buddhist Vihara and BGKT. This was subsequently published together with *Introducing Buddhism*, for worldwide distribution, by the Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation Taiwan. (www.budaedu.org) (Book code EN074)

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

Websites

BGKT Buddhist Group of Kendal (Theravada)
www.communicate.co.uk/lakes/buddhistgroupofkendal/

Bhavana Society and Bhante Henepola Gunaratana Maha Thera
www.bhavanasociety.org

Ketumati Buddhist Vihara Oldham and Venerable Pidiville Piyatissa Maha Thera
www.ketumati.org

Books

Balangoda Ananda Maitreya, Venerable, and Jayasili (Jacquetta Gomes), *Introducing Buddhism* (Taipei, Taiwan, The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 2007) (Book code EN074) (www.budaedu.org) (This includes the booklet: *Requirements and Ceremonies for the Five Precepts (Panca Sila)*, *The Eight Precepts with Right Livelihood as the Eighth (Ajivatthamaka Sila)*, *Dhamma Teachers Certificate*, issued by the

Buddhist Group of Kendal (Theravada) and Ketumati Buddhist Vihara at Wesak 2006)

Henepola Gunaratana, Bhante. 2008. (Revised edition) *Bhavana Vandana: Devotions for Meditation*. (High View West Virginia USA, Bhavana Society) (Available for download from www.lulu.com)

Henepola Gunaratana, Bhante. 2001. *Eight Mindful Steps to Happiness: Walking the Path of the Buddha*. (Boston USA, Wisdom Publications) (0-86171-176-9)

Hammalawa Saddhatissa, Venerable, and Pesala, Venerable. 1990. (2nd edition) *A Buddhist's Manual*. (London, British Mahabodhi Society)

Articles

Gomes, Jacquetta, "The development and use of the Eight Precepts for lay practitioners, *Upasakas* and *Upasikas* in Theravada Buddhism in the West", *Contemporary Buddhism*, Volume 5(1) (May, 2004) 47-63 (ISSN 1463-9947) (available online at www.journalsonlinetandf.co.uk)

(Available online at www.wlu.ca/documents/6478/The_development.pdf)